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Architecture for Secure Remote Access and Transmission Using a Generalized Password Scheme with Biometrics Features

The present invention concerns a computer architecture that allows secure access to a server behind a firewall and in particular to a system that employs multiple computers outside of the firewall and a password scheme that includes a one-time password and has biometric features.

5 As computer hacking is quite common nowadays, it is very important to control access to a private network of computers (for example, the desktop computers in a company network) – to order to protect the loss of sensitive data to external hackers. A *firewall* is a component or components designed to restrict access to a private network from the Internet.

10 There has been recently considerable interest to use biometrics features for authentication of computer users who communicate through a global information network such as the Internet as well as local area networks (see e.g., R. Jain et al. “Biometrics: Personal Identification in Networked Society” Kluwer Publishers, Boston, MA, 1999). The biometrics features of an individual are unique and provide a 15 very convenient method for personal identification. The term biometrics generally means any human characteristic that has the following desirable properties:

- universality – every person should have the characteristic
- uniqueness – no two persons should possess the same characteristic
- permanence – the characteristic should not change with time

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- measurability – it should be possible to measure the characteristic in a quantitative manner.

There are many practical issues involved in developing an authentication scheme using biometrics. Some good pattern recognition algorithms should be developed and used to recognize the biometrics to a very degree of accuracy (even under "noisy" conditions) and to within a reasonable computer processing time. Also, the biometrics should not be prone to easy tampering by hackers. There are also privacy and network security issues that are involved for developing an on-line biometrics-based authentication system.

10 The features that have been commonly used in developing automatic authentication systems are fingerprints, voice, iris, retina patterns, and face. Also, there are some other more unconventional biometrics such as body odors, gait, ear shape, etc. that have been used for developing methods for personal identification. There are several currently available systems for on-line fingerprint verification and
15 on-line signature verification. A secure method for accessing files using fingerprints has been described in copending U.S. patent application number 09/662,298 entitled SECURE SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ACCESSING FILES IN COMPUTERS USING FINGERPRINTS, which is incorporated herein by reference.

20 The use of the fingerprints is the oldest biometrics-based method for identification purposes that predates the advent of computer technology. The technique has been widely used at least since 6000 B.C. It has been in use by police forces for centuries for the identification of criminals. Consequently, in some cultures there may be still some stigma attached to the recording of fingerprints of people who are not accused of any crime. Nonetheless, fingerprints are still widely used. For example, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) routinely collects the fingerprints of all people applying for Permanent Residence ("Green Card") and keeps an extensive database of these fingerprints. With the introduction of more and more computer hardware, the identification method using fingerprints has become progressively more and more advanced and easier to use in an on-line
25 environment.

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The idea of one time password mechanism is described in an article by L. Lamport entitled "Password Authentication with Insecure Communications," *Communications of the ACM*, vol. 24, No. 11, pp 770-772, 1981. It is designed to counter an attack based on eavesdropping of network connections to get login id and password. In order to use one time password mechanism the user first chooses a password and stores it in the authentication server. The server chooses a number n (something reasonably large) and recursively hashes the password n times (i.e. computes $\text{hash}^n(\text{password})$ for some hash function) and stores the result in a database on the server along with the user id and the number n. The number n represents the number of one time password the user can use i.e., the number of log in sessions the user can have with this password mechanism schemes. With each use the hash function is applied one less time, creating a respectively different password. If the user exceeds the n number of log in sessions then, he or she needs to initialize again the one time password mechanism with the server.

One version of the one-time password scheme is called S/KEY and is described in RFC 1760 by N. Haller entitled "The S/Key One-Time Password System," 1995. Briefly, a one-time password mechanism works as shown in Figure 1.

The one-time password process begins with a table in the remote machine (authentication server) 102 that contains the log in identifier, the number n and the value $\text{hash}^n(\text{password})$. Next, a user logs into his or her local computer 100 using the password and log in identifier and request access to the remote server 102. The user's computer then sends an authentication request to the remote machine 102. After receiving the authentication request, the remote server 102 sends the value n with a request for the user's computer 100 to calculate the value $\text{hash}^{n-1}(\text{password})$. The user's computer 100 calculates this value and sends it back to the remote server 102. When the remote server 102 receives $\text{hash}^{n-1}(\text{password})$ it assigns the value to a local variable y and then calculates $\text{hash}(y)$. This value should be the same as $\text{hash}^n(\text{password})$. If $\text{hash}(y)$ matches the stored value, $\text{hash}^n(\text{password})$, then the server grants the user access, decrements n by 1 and stores the value hash^n ¹(password) in its database.

The subject invention implements a mechanism that uses biometric features combined with a one-time password to generate cryptographic keys that are

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used for secure communication, authentication of remote users and accessing of secured file based on a hierarchical scheme of access privileges.

The proposed architecture for the remote machine access authentication scheme has at least two dedicated computers outside of the firewall to provide secure log in. As shown in Figure 2, a remote computer 100 communicates with the first dedicated computer 202 outside the firewall 206 before establishing any communication with any computer 208 inside the firewall. This first computer 202 works with an internal server 102, through a second computer outside the firewall, to authenticate the user's access privileges. A second computer 204 outside the firewall has a secure connection 205 with the server 102 inside the firewall 206 and acts as a proxy for the first computer 202. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the connection between the remote machine 100 and the first dedicated machine 204 outside the firewall 206, the connection between the two dedicated machines 202 and 204 outside the firewall 206, and the connection between the second dedicated computer 204 and the server 102 inside the firewall all use Secure Socket Layer (SSL) connections. Secure Socket Layer connections are described in a document entitled "Introduction to SSL"

<http://developer.netscape.com/docs/manuals/security/ssl/in/contents.htm> which is incorporated by reference herein for its teachings on SSL connections. Although the exemplary embodiment shows two computers 202 and 204 outside of the firewall 206, it is contemplated that more computers may be used to further impede access to the server by an unauthorized user.

The process begins when the remote computer 100 and the first dedicated computer 202 establish an SSL connection. The dedicated computer 202 then sends a request to the remote computer 100 for the user's *strong password* information (by a "strong password" we mean the user's password derived from a one-time-password (OTP) and biometrics features). One way that this may be done is by setting up a web page that requests the user's strong password. The OTP scheme allows the system to use a different password each time providing unpredictability and consequent security against any compromise by a hacker. In order to use this system, the user initializes the number of OTP's and also provide a secure pass-phrase into the server 102 inside the firewall. This is typically a server that already exists within the user's organization. The second dedicated computer 204 acts as a proxy for the first

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dedicated computer 202 and does not allow any other connection from any other computers. The second dedicated computer 204 is connected to the server inside the firewall using an SSL connection.

In addition, the user has previously trained the server to recognize the biometric password. As described in the above-referenced patent application, this password is biometric data that the server has been trained to recognize as identifying the user. It may represent a fingerprint, a signature, a spoken phrase or any other feature that can be used to uniquely identify the user. Typically the server is trained to recognize the biometric data by analyzing many different samples of particular biometric feature. For example, a user may provide N right thumb prints, or signatures where N is a number that is large enough to ensure that a correct decision may be made in response to later presented biometric data at least a given percentage of the time (e.g. 95 percent). The training in the server may, for example, use a neural network or may use more conventional statistical processing techniques such as the recognition and clustering of features and the generation of multivariate Gaussian distributions for the clustered features. A particular biometric data set is then analyzed according to the stored model to determine the probability that it matches. If this probability is greater than a predetermined threshold value, the biometric password is accepted as identifying the individual

The user then generates the strong password and sends it to the first dedicated computer 202. The strong password may be generated, for example, by concatenating the biometric password with the OTP and, optionally, with a symmetric key that may be used to decrypt the transferred message data and encrypting the combined password using any one of a number of conventional encryption algorithms such as RSA or Elliptic Curve cryptography. This combined password has the advantage of the OTP that the same password is never transmitted twice because the biometric data typically varies from transmission to transmission. This variability may be used as a further verification, whereby the server rejects a received biometric password if the biometric data set is identical to a previously received data set.

After verifying the strong password, the second dedicated computer 204 establishes a direct SSL connection with the remote computer 100 through the Internet 200 and acts as a proxy for the remote computer 100 to the server 102 inside the

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firewall 206. (A less secure way would to establish a direct SSL connection between the remote computer and the server – this option could be used at the discretion of the organization.) This scheme differs from the AT&T scheme called ABSENT in the following way: the system according to the subject invention has at least *two* dedicated computers outside the firewall 206, and the remote computer 100 initiates communication only with the first computer 202 which does not have any direct connections with any computers inside the firewall. Thus the arrangement according to the present invention provides less vulnerability a more secure communication link as compared to the ABSENT system.

The present invention uses up to three layers of protection depending on the sensitivity of the protection needed. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, these layers of protection are applied in the following order:

i. At the top layer, an SSL connection is established between the remote computer and a computer outside the firewall that acts as a proxy for the server.

ii. In the second layer, a OTP is used that changes periodically to as a means to authenticate the user's continued presence. For example, every 15 minutes the dedicated machine inside the Firewall requests an OTP password to check the user's continued presence and disrupts the communication if the authentication is not valid. The time frame for periodical authentication may be changed at the wish of the organization depending on its sensitivity level.

iii. In the third layer, the actual message data is further encrypted using any conventional encryption scheme (such as DES, ECC) between the remote computer and the computer to be accessed inside the organization. The key for the encryption is derived using the OTP and biometrics features (such as fingerprints) as described above. As the OTP changes periodically, it provides an extra level of security.

As an example of an application of a the secure architecture according to the present invention, consider a scenario in which there are several sensitive files within the organization that may be accessed by respective personnel depending on

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their levels of access privileges. (In this example, the files on a file server 300 are described as top secret (TS) files 302, secret (S) files 304, confidential (C) files 306, all general access (AA) files 308; and only some personnel (I) can be given the privilege to access all the files, other personnel (II) could be given the privilege to access the all files except the top secret files, still other personnel (III) could be given access only to the confidential and general access files and a final group (IV) may be allowed access only to the general access files, see Figure 3):

To make the accesses secure the present invention performs the following operations:

- 10 i. The files corresponding to each category of access are stored in encrypted form using a different secret key, one for each category of files.
- 15 ii. Two software modules are used - one running on the server and the other running on the user's machine. The server software module is used to process requests submitted by the users to access a particular file and verifies that user has the privilege to access that file. If it determines that the user has the appropriate privileges, it then sends the following

$$E_s(k) + E_k(F) \quad (1)$$

20 Here F is the file, k is the secret key used to encrypt the file, s is a key that we refer as the *strong key* - it is derived from the user's OTP password, and biometrics features of the user, and $+$ denotes the usual concatenation. The client software module receives message (1) from the server module, and then it decrypts $E_s(k)$ and uses the key k to decrypt $E_k(F)$ and gets the file F . Also, the client module is responsible for sending a file access request to the server software module. (It is possible to make these files readable by using only the client software module - this would impede any copying of the information in the file).